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ABSTRACT

This document contains a brief bibliography of peer-reviewed literature, with abstracts, on family support networks. It is one of 12 bibliographies on aging prepared by the National Agricultural Library for its "Pathfinders" series of publications. Topics covered by the other 11 bibliographies include aging parents, adult children, dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the elderly (written for educators), dementia and Alzheimer's disease in the elderly (written for consumers), family caregiving, grandparenting, humor in later life, intergenerational relationships, living arrangements in later life, pets and the elderly, and sibling relationships in adulthood. This bibliography on family support networks contains citations for 12 books and articles for researchers and educators, and 2 books and articles for consumers. It concludes with a list of organizations that readers may contact for further assistance. (NB)

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FEBRUARY 1990

FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORKS

PREPARED BY BILLIE H. FRAZIER, Ph.D., CFLE**

This PATHFINDER has been prepared to help researchers, educators and consumers better understand family support networks in the family life of middle-aged adult children and aging parents.

RESEARCHER/EDUCATOR

"Black/White Family Comparisons in Helping and Decision-Making Networks of Impaired Elderly," Virginia L. Smerglia, Gary T. Deimling, and Charles M. Barresi. Family Relations, 37(3):305-309, July 1988.

The author examines similarities and differences between white and black aged persons concerning the availability of nuclear kin, and the composition of their helping and decision-making networks. Implications are indicated in the following three findings: (1) Similarities exist in helping and decision-making networks for blacks and whites. (2) Impaired white elderly are more involved in decisions regarding their care than are blacks. (3) Professionals are mostly uninvolved in the helping and decision-making networks of blacks and whites.

"Exchange Patterns in the Informal Support Networks of the Elderly: The Impact of Reciprocity on Morale," Eleanor Palo Stroller. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 47(2):335-342, May 1985.

Patterns of exchange of assistance within the informal helping networks of the elderly are examined. It is indicated in the results that most elders are involved in some type of exchange, although the proportion reporting no exchange increases as one moves from children to other relatives to friends or neighbors. Older persons who receive help usually reciprocate in some way. It is suggested that the inability to reciprocate rather than the need for assistance has a greater negative effect on morale.

This PATHFINDER lists significant resources that are judged to be accurate, readable and available. Opinions expressed in the publication do not reflect views of the United States Department of Agriculture.

GPO 907-729

"The Extended Family as a Source of Support to Elderly Blacks," Robert Joseph Taylor, The Gerontologist, 25(5):488-495, 1985.

The impact of family and demographic factors on the frequency of support from family members is examined among a sample of blacks, 55 years of age and over. The researcher found that income, education, region, degree of family interaction, proximity of relatives, and having adult children are determinants of frequency of support. It is indicated in the findings that black elderly are active participants in family networks. Elderly respondents report significant levels of interaction with family, relatively close residential proximity to immediate family, extensive familial affective bonds, and a high degree of satisfaction derived from family life.

"Informal Supports of Older Adults: A Rural-Urban Comparison," Jean Pearson Scott and Karen A. Roberto. Family Relations, 36(4):444-449, October 1987.

These authors compare a rural and an urban sample of older adults on exchanges of assistance and social activities with children and friends. Illness prompts more giving and receiving of assistance for rural older adults in comparison with urban informal supports. Rural widows are more actively engaged in exchanges of assistance with friend networks than urban widows. Activities with friends are characterized by instrumental as well as social qualities in the rural sample. Implications for family professionals are discussed.

Mutual Help Groups--Organization and Development, Phyllis R. Silverman. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1980.

This book is for professionals who are considering setting up a mutual help group. In recent years, more people are recognizing the value of getting together with other people with whom they share a problem or situation. Through a mutual help experience, people are discovering positive ways of coping with crises in their lives.

"Neighbors' Support of Older Widows Who Live Alone in Their Own Homes," Shirley L. O'Bryant. The Gerontologist, 25(3):305-310, 1985.

Recent older widows who live alone are a vulnerable group who need both social and instrumental support. In this study, the author compares neighbor support given to widows categorized into three groups--those who have one or more children in the same city, those who have children who live elsewhere, and those who are childless. Although childless widows need greater support, they do not receive it at a significantly higher level. Neighborhood interactions and the receipt of neighbor support are affected by both previous lifestyles and present circumstances of older widows.

"Older Persons' Perceptions of the Quality of Their Human Support Systems," Peggy Hawley and John D. Chamley." Ageing and Society, 6:195-312, 1986.

Elders identify and evaluate the important people in their lives. Highest scores were given to friends, lowest to neighbors. Grandchildren do not appear to play a central role in the lives of these elders. Characteristics which typified good relationships were reciprocity, trustworthiness, friendliness and responsibility.

"Parental and Filial Relationships: Obligation, Support and Abuse," Susan K. Steinmetz. In Family and Support Systems Across the Life Span, Susan K. Steinmetz (ed.). New York, NY: Plenum, 1988, 165-182.

The myth and reality of parent-child obligations and their fulfillment over the life cycle and over time are explored in this chapter. The author feels that our expectation to provide care for our elderly kin is embedded in traditions and surrounded by myths. As our society becomes more complex, and demands of multiple roles increase, we may find that the family will need to obtain additional societal supports to fulfill the expressive role of family support.

Social Support Networks and the Care of the Elderly, William J. Sauer and Raymond T. Coward. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, 1985.

Special sections in the book include state of the art, family relations, community relations, social networks under special circumstances, and the applications of theory and research. It is a collection of readings that focus on the role of social support networks in maintaining the social, psychological, and physical well-being of elderly Americans.

"Social Supports in Relation to Physical Health and Symptoms of Depression in the Elderly," Igor Grant, Thomas L. Patterson and Joel Yager. American Journal of Psychiatry, 145(10):1254-1258, October 1988.

Impoverishment of the social support network has been related to poor health. It has also been suggested that effective social networks buffer effects of stress, decrease psychological distress, and help maintain well-being. Authors examine the relationship of social supports to physical and psychological well-being of elders. Subjects with more symptoms of depression report having fewer emotionally satisfying consistent supports from relatives, but those who had physical illnesses reported more supports from relatives.

"Support Networks and Health-related Change in the Elderly: Theory-based Nursing Strategies," Gretchen Crawford. Family Community Health, 10(2):39-48, 1987.

In this article, the author focuses on strategies to promote the health of the elderly in order to prevent costly institutional care. Sections include: health-promotion activities; support networks and social support; the operation of social support; changes and strategies to enhance social support; and the implementation of support network strategies. Support network members may provide information and advice about possible alternatives, and membership in the network provides a climate where people feel safe in making changes. In instances where clients' health, needs, and abilities permit, building reciprocal relationships may be useful to increasing morale and self-esteem.

"Use of Informal and Formal Support Networks by Rural Elderly Poor," Jean Pearson Scott and Karen A. Roberto. The Gerontologist, 25(6):624-630, 1985.

The use of informal and formal support networks and the factors associated with their use are studied in order to identify patterns of network involvement. The subjects are older rural adults whose incomes fall below the poverty threshold and a comparative group of older rural adults with higher incomes. It is indicated in the results that formal service use among the poor group is limited to situations of extreme need. There is evidence that when formal services are used, they are used in conjunction with support from children and friends. Use of these services does not take the place of informal assistance.

CONSUMER

"Planning Ahead for Elder Care" Series (HE 362 - 1-8). Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service, 1989.

The Planning Ahead for Elder Care series is part of a North Carolina Agricultural Extension Service program funded by the Kate B. Reynolds Health Care Trust. Titles of the leaflets include: The Management Challenge; Decisions About Housing; Health Insurance Fundamentals; Health Care/Insurance Decisions; Decisions About Finances; Death Related Decisions; Building Effective Relationships; Building Positive Attitudes, and Decisions about Housing.

"Self-Help Groups," Billie H. Frazier. College Park, Maryland: The University of Maryland Cooperative Extension Service Fact Sheet 398, 1983-84.

The author of this fact sheet covers the topic of "What is Self-Help?," "Why are Self-Help Groups Needed?," "What Is the Purpose of Self-Help Groups?," "How Do Self-Help Groups Operate?," "What Happens at a Self-Help Group Meeting?," "How Can You Find the Self-Help Group That You Need?," and "How Can You Organize a Self-Help Group?."

C O N T A C T F O R A S S I S T A N C E

County, area, or state agency on aging

County Cooperative Extension Service (under county government in telephone book)

County department of social services

American Association of Retired Persons
1909 K. Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20024
(202) 872-4700

Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Association
70 E. Lake
Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60601
1-800-621-0379

American Society on Aging
833 Market Street
Suite 512
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 543-2617

Commission on Legal Problems of the Elderly
1800 M Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 331-2297

National Council on Aging
600 Maryland Avenue, SW
West Wing 100
Washington, D.C. 20024
(202) 479-1200

National Hospice Organization
1901 N. Fort Myer Drive
Suite 902
Arlington, VA 22209
(703) 243-5900

This PATHFINDER resulted from the author's research at the National Agricultural Library while on sabbatical leave from The University of Maryland during the summer and fall of 1989. Using database searches of AGRICOLA, Psycinfo, Social Scisearch, ERIC, Family Resources and Dissertation Abstracts International, relevant references were reviewed and annotated. It is authored by:

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